Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Strategic Landpower Dialogue

A Conversation with Major General Lars S. Lervik

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FEATURING

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Mark F. Cancian: Welcome, everyone, to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. I'm Mark Cancian. I'm a retired Marine colonel and a senior advisor here at the Defense and Security Department. We're very proud to partner with AUSA for this conversation today. And we're also grateful for the support of General Dynamics. So thank you, General Dynamics, for supporting this series. The conversation wouldn't be possible without you.

We're honored to have Major General Lars Lervik, chief of the Norwegian Army, today here for a discussion on Norwegian defense priorities, modernization efforts, and lessons learned from the war in Ukraine. General, it's great to have you with us.

I'll only briefly summarize the general's bio. Since graduating from officer candidate school he's served in a variety of roles through his career, including commander of the Armored and Telemark battalions, director of the Department of Security Policy, Crisis Management, and Readiness at the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Defense, and commander of Brigade North. The general holds advanced degrees from King's College London and the U.S. Army War College. After serving as commander of Brigade North he assumed his current role as chief of the Norwegian Army in June 2020. In this capacity, he's responsible for the land warfare capabilities, training, and operational readiness of the Norwegian Army. We're lucky to have the general with us today.

And let me add a personal note that I have operated with the Norwegian Army when I was in the Marine Corps. My infantry battalion participated in an exercise in northern Norway, north of Narvik. We were preparing, practicing to guard against any aggression by one of Norway's neighbors to the east. And I'm not talking about the Swedes or the Finns. And I can say that the Norwegian Army takes national security seriously. I can also say that Norway is a lovely country, but it has some extreme weather and very steep hills. So with that, welcome General. And over to you, Tom.

Tom Karako: Thank you, Mark. And thanks to the whole AUSA team for partnering with us on the series again. I have not been to Norway. I'd like to fix that sometime soon.

Look, we've done this series now for a couple years. We usually have a senior U.S. Army general. This is the first time we've had one of our allies. Glad to have you here, General Lervik. You know, Norway founding NATO member, very timely to come over and talk to us about this. Mark was alluding to Norway's modernization, some of the lessons from Ukraine, how we ought to think about deterrence with NATO, and other activities in the high north by Russia, by other people as well. So

we're going to go through a lot of different topics and we'll also be taking questions from the audience online. So please, if you go to the event page, send those in and they'll come to me with a tablet here, and we'll work them into the general.

So thank you, sir, for coming out here. We're going to start off, as we always do in this series, with a version of the same question. But the answers are never quite the same. You know, Norway's in a very geographically, geostrategically pretty important part of the world. So from where you sit, what is your vision of landpower? What you need to do, what you must be prepared to do for the Norwegian Army, both today and in the force of 2040?

Major General Lars S. Lervik: Thank you very much. And thank you very much for having me. It's a great honor to be here.

And before answering the question, I'd like to – for a Norwegian being here in the U.S. is actually something special. A hundred and fifty years ago, one-third of our population immigrated to the U.S. So it's a saying, all Norwegians have an uncle in the U.S. I actually have a deceased uncle in the U.S. So yeah, we do. And also, on a more personal note, I have twice lived here with family, and both education or training in – at Fort Knox and then Carlisle, Pennsylvania. And also, we have a strong relationship with not only the U.S. Marine Corps, but also the U.S. Army and the U.S. National Guard. And so it's a great honor to be here.

Talk about landpower, and I'd like to start out kind of in the more general part of it, landpower is an essential part of the joint force. And what landpower does is, first of all, to deter. And I still think in the 21st century the strongest signal – strongest political signal is actually to deploy boots on the ground. That's why NATO, after the annexation of Crimea, deployed soldiers from multiple nations to the – to the Baltic nations. That's why Norway now is building up and increasing the number of soldiers in our northernmost province, close to the Russian border. It's a sign about the willingness and the ability to defend yourself, and by that hopefully deterring. And then it's also about fighting and winning our nation's war where people live, to protect our people, to protect our interests.

And where we do it? Well, as soldiers we don't choose our missions; we solve them. And even for a small army like the Norwegian one, we will of course be able to and willing to fight at home. But it's also about fighting abroad, if that is what's required. So, for the Norwegian Army, obviously, defending Norway and the Nordics, but also when that is required as a good ally standing up for allies wherever that might be. And that's the

reason why I have – I have spent almost two years of my life in Afghanistan, fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with our allies.

Mr. Karako: Well, thank you for doing that. And you know, I'd be remiss if I didn't note that the U.S. Army celebrated its 250th birthday last year but your army is a little bit older, 1628.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah.

Mr. Karako: You've been around for a little while, had some lessons for us, so. (Laughs.)

Look, in preparing for this I went back and read your most recent National Security Strategy, your National Defense Pledge document, and also your Intelligence Service's Focus 2026. I wonder if you could start big picture for us talking about Norway's threat perception. There's a number of things in these documents I might refer to here in the discussion, but how has Norway's – especially in terms of your geographic position, your strategic position, how has your threat calculus changed from the perspective of the government and the military, and also from the – from the public perspective, for instance, in the last five years or so?

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. We have been for many, many years the closest neighbor to the largest concentration of nuclear weapons in the world. So from the Norwegian-Russian border to those nukes, it's only about two, three hours' drive. My soldiers on the border can literally see Russian Army barracks in their binoculars from the – from the border. So we are – we know who the neighbor is, even though we might have forgotten it for a while. I think now there is no doubt about who the neighbor is, and also that this neighbor is not necessarily a threat to Norway but actually to the West. Their nuclear submarines present their second-strike capabilities, also a threat to the Atlantic link. And by that, we are – we view ourselves as being the first line of homeland defense, not only the Norwegian homeland defense but for our allies and also for the U.S., because these nukes are not directly only against Norway. They are a threat to all of us.

Mr. Karako: Sure, sure.

Well, in the Focus 2026 document, for instance, it's got some pretty interesting one-liners in there. First of all, it talks about the Ukraine conflict, reminding us, you know, Russian activities in Ukraine are a brutal expression of Russian power politics. There's a whole section called "Lasting Confrontation with Moscow." I wonder how you might

characterize the Norwegian military, again, government perspective on Russian – especially Russian activities in the past five years? I mean, there's – I think it's your defense document that talks about kind of the blurred lines between peace and war.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah.

Mr. Karako: So is there a sense in which Moscow is at war with Europe right now?

Major Gen. Lervik: If it's war, or if it's competition, or if it's something – I think at least it's not the way it used to be. So I think we are – we are seeing a very, very different situation play out. And even though the war in Ukraine is where you're seeing it has the largest consequences, we're seeing some of the same tension as well increasing in the Arctic. So that has definitely been a driver. We're seeing an increase of espionage. We're seeing an increase of trying to influence public perception, even though, it's fair to say, that the situation in the north is somewhat calmer than what we find in the Baltics, for instance. So there's still – it's calmer than in some other areas bordering to Russia.

But I think your question about the threat perception, I think it's the easiest way to kind of – to underline. What that has led to is the fact that we have more than doubled our defense spending over the last few years. And it's a unanimous parliament who decided to do that. That doesn't happen very often in in a country like Norway.

Mr. Karako: We don't have much of that here either.

Major Gen. Lervik: No, everyone signed up. And we are continuing to increase our defense spending. And it's not controversial. And that also reflects 75 percent of all Norwegians are in polls saying they will defend Norway if necessary using – providing armed resistance against anyone who tries it. And that's also, I think, describes a country that is waking up to a new situation and a new threat.

Mr. Karako: And was it primarily Ukraine? There's also been these sabotage operations of various stripes, that's highlighted in your defense document, for instance.

Major Gen. Lervik: I think Ukraine – the annexation of Crimea and specifically the full-scale invasion – is where the last illusions about Russian will and ability to use armed force against their neighbors were gone, I think. So that pulled it – that really made that pretty obvious to all of us, I think.

Mr. Karako: Well, we want to get to the lessons from Ukraine, from your perspective and how you're observing them. But I guess, big picture, how are you seeing, in the largest sense, what the Norwegian Army is being asked to do? There's been some expansion of force structure, for instance. Big picture, how has the events of recent years affected the asks for the Norwegian Army?

Major Gen. Lervik: What we've been asked to do is to short of three times increase the number of personnel, more than three times increase the firepower in the Norwegian Army. And this is being done to reflect a heightened ambition, both in regards to defending Norwegian territory, the Norwegian population, but also taking a greater responsibility, especially in the north, with Sweden and Finland becoming members of NATO. So these areas, these large areas, which is now one NATO territory, needs to be defended. And part of that job goes actually to the Norwegian Army. So that's the rationale. And, of course, we've all seen what's happened with population who ends up on the wrong side of the front line. So meaning all decisions in regards to trading space for time is viewed in a different light now than it was only five years ago.

Mr. Karako: How so?

Major Gen. Lervik: No, because you will see that the population that is in the Russian occupied territories, in Ukraine, is being harassed, terrorized. And we don't want to have our own population experience that. So I think that's the rationale between the Baltics approach, with not an inch, and we are looking at not necessarily copying that, but we are looking at also having a much, much higher ambition. And that reflects on the Army, but also on the Norwegian armed forces.

Mr. Karako: And just to be explicit, trading space for time, I mean, you know, the experience of Bucha in 2022, that's a costly trade.

Major Gen. Lervik: That's a costly trade, yeah.

Mr. Karako: So well, you know, especially given Norway's geography, Russia's Arctic land forces have taken some significant losses there. What does that mean from where you sit? What have you learned about maybe our shared or perhaps Russia's capability gaps or risks, for instance? And what does – what does these activities by Russian Arctic forces in Ukraine – what does that mean to you?

Major Gen. Lervik: I think we, and many allies, were kind of surprised of how bad they performed at the beginning, and then how willing they are to stay in the fight and continue to have massive casualties, but are still continuing to

fight. So I think that reflects some on the Russians strengths and weaknesses.

Zooming in on what's happening up in our area, we're seeing that about only 20 percent of the land forces which were there before the war are now present. The rest are fighting down in Ukraine. Having said that, these formations that belong up there are now larger than before the war. And they have upscaled from brigade level to division level while fighting a war.

Mr. Karako: Locally they have.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah, but they are – not locally, but actually while they're fighting down in Ukraine. So we've seen them growing while they still are fighting. But the numbers on our borders are about 20 percent of what they used to be.

Mr. Karako: And that's not withstanding all of the over a million losses, casualties, over the past four years.

Major Gen. Lervik: Exactly. They've been able to regenerate that. Having said that, the Northern Fleet and the strategic submarines, most of their air force capabilities, are about the same. And they continue to, in the maritime domain, operate pretty much in the same manner as they did before the Ukraine conflict. And also seeing that air assets in our area continues to attack Ukraine from bases close to our area.

Mr. Karako: Yeah. So, back to the you don't want to have a Bucha. You don't want to tolerate that trading space for time thing. What does that mean concretely in terms of how you're organizing, how you're training, how you're perhaps equipping differently with different capability emphases? What does that translate to?

Major Gen. Lervik: There are kind of two drivers as we look at it. And now I'm going to be land-centric.

Mr. Karako: That's OK.

Major Gen. Lervik: The first one is what you said about Bucha. And seeing that our – Kirkenes, the city on the border, the 10,000 Norwegians living there, we don't want them to end up on the wrong side of any front line. So, of course, that's a key motivation. But we're also seeing, and the Russians have clearly stated, that after Sweden and Finland becoming members of NATO they plan to double the size of the land forces on the Norwegian-Finnish border.

So we need to – as we prepare for the threat after the Ukraine war, it's going to be larger and more capable than before. So as to what's the answer to this, on the Army side we are focused – or, prioritizing building up a new brigade in the northernmost province. That brigade will have capabilities of type rangers – (armed recce?) – sensors, and firepower. And the ambition is to be able to hold terrain, but also to inflict massive casualties on anyone trying to attack us. That is being reinforced by an increased focus on air defense and also long-range precision fires, and other intelligence capabilities.

Mr. Karako: Well, I want to dig into that because, again, that Focus 2026 document specifically talked about the post-Ukraine activities that quote, "raised the importance of defensive land-based operations." And I think you – again, your defense pledge document talked about getting at least four – at least four more NASAMS units, for instance. So what operationally, in terms of equipment, how are you thinking differently about homeland defense? So you talked about needing more forces, but what are the other implications there?

Major Gen. Lervik: In some ways, we are – I would say, we're getting the resources to do what we've been planning for quite a while. So long precision – long-range precision fires, it's been on our plans for a long time now to get the resources to do it. We started expanding our air defenses about 10 years ago. Now we are increasing that. And also not only the NASAMS-type of capabilities, but also counter-UAS, and the whole multilayered air defense part. And then, actually yesterday, we got the first new – two new main battle tanks for the Norwegian Army. The new Leopard 2A8s. So in some ways we are doing what we've been planning to do for quite a while. But now we have the resources to do it, and are able to do it faster.

The other part is that we are looking at, and based on observations from Ukraine, we also realized that we need to modernize as well. So that's where investing in drones, digitalizing our C2 structure, looking at increased electronic warfare capabilities are examples of where new capabilities are being prioritized, in addition to building up the existing ones.

Mr. Karako: Now, you mentioned long-range precision fires. Curious, for instance, what you're thinking about in terms of the timeline, the scope of capabilities there. Let me just stay with that. What's sort of the timeline on that front in terms of those fires?

Major Gen. Lervik: We are – we are – our ambition is to stand up a rocket artillery battalion by 2028. We signed a contract in January this year.

Mr. Karako: That's the Chunmoo?

Major Gen. Lervik: That's the Chunmoo, yeah.

Mr. Karako: Yes. Yeah, South Korean.

Major Gen. Lervik: So – which will give us a range up to 500 kilometers, which will be a gamechanger in our – in our area.

Mr. Karako: Great. And of course, there's also – you already mentioned NASAMS air defense.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah.

Mr. Karako: You're getting more of those. NASAMS has also been operational in Ukraine. What have you seen from the use of NASAMS there that – and how is that changing your thinking there?

Major Gen. Lervik: NASAMS has proven that it is – actually is a very, very capable system against some types of threats. For instance, cruise missiles, very, very capable. And then also, as we are continuing to support Ukraine both with training and also with equipment, we are drawing lessons of how they use it as a part of the integrated air defense. So that's one of the reasons why we want to continue to build on NASAMS with Norwegian Kongsberg, and Raytheon continues to develop that weapons system for future threats as well.

But also recognizing that we cannot use AMRAAM missiles against Shahed drones or cheaper threats, so we need to find a way of also working out the cost curve here. So we need cheaper and mass of some systems, and those high-end needs to be reserved against the high-end threats.

Mr. Karako: And what's the – sort of the plan for going out and getting that counter-UAS capability?

Major Gen. Lervik: That's being executed now. So we have some systems in place. What I'm looking at is trying to utilize effectors we already have – like remote weapons stations, machineguns, all that – but connecting them through a digitalized C4IS structure and connected to modern sensors. That's what we're looking at. And I think in the future all elements of the armed forces – that being a(n) infantry squad, or a headquater(s), or an air station – need to have some kind of capabilities to protect themselves against those cheap type of threats that the drones will be.

Mr. Karako: And how about on the offensive drone? You mentioned the drones earlier getting sort of strike or ISR. What kind of things might we expect there?

Major Gen. Lervik: We are working on both. And we currently have now three drone swarm systems operational in the army, not because they think the future will look like that but that's kind of a first step of taking innovation out to the operational units, giving them experience, and looking at how we can continuously expand that.

So in that drone swarm it has ISR, it has FPV drones, it has counter-UAS drones, and it's all being controlled by our own battlefield-management system. So that's been, in Norwegian terms, a pretty fast development. But the numbers are still rather small.

Mr. Karako: And what about the role of space, both kind of what you have seen in the importance of space – space-based sensing, surveillance – what's the role of space for the Norwegian Army?

Major Gen. Lervik: The Norwegian Armed Forces recognized that we needed to really step up in regards to space a few years ago. So currently we have a number of satellites that have been launched and operated by Norwegian – by Norway, which will significantly increase our ability to keep situational awareness and have ISR coverage in the north, specifically in maritime but also in the land domain.

That also gives us broadband in the Arctic, which has been a major issue because of where we are on the globe. So that is being – now getting online, which will significantly enhance our ability to share data not only with Norwegian assets, but with our allies.

And this effort is being done in close connection with U.S., so it's a very, very close cooperation in that space development between Norwegian and U.S. capabilities.

The other thing, which is more – not necessarily a fun fact, but we have – we have the only satellite launch facility in Europe up north. So that's also one of the things that we're looking at, to expand that and being able to launch commercial satellites but also other satellites for Norway as well.

Mr. Karako: Well, look, you already alluded to doubling defense spending. You've highlighted a handful of capability areas, three or four areas just now, again going from up to three brigades, for instance; growing the conscript intake. Step back a bit and look big picture again in terms of the army's modernization trajectory. What are the – what are the

biggest challenges? And what are the other big goals that you perhaps haven't hit on yet?

Major Gen. Lervik: It's going from a – the cultural change, starting with that, which probably is the most challenging because armies consist of soldiers. And so we need to go from a(n) army that was focused on battalion-level operations largely abroad to an army that is able to operate in division level together with allied corps. That sounds easy; it's actually lots of things need to change to do that. So what we have – what we have – in order to do that – in order to grow as we have planned, there are three elements I would like to point to.

First of all, to achieve this in the time we have available and also within the budget, standardizing is really, really important. So whenever it's possible, we will try to standardize the equipment, the infrastructure to get as much out of the money as fast as possible. That means we are buying the same K9 howitzers for the new battalions of artillery. It means that –

Mr. Karako: These are South Korean? Yeah.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yes, they're South Korean.

It means that the Nordic nations, we are now buying exactly the same CV90 armored infantry fighting vehicle, because if we're going to fight together it makes sense to have the same equipment. So that's an example of standardizing.

If we only standardized we would create the army of yesterday only, so we need to innovate simultaneously. So that's why we have established a number of innovation programs in the army where we have allocated money from our investment programs specifically for innovation and testing, and not to buy this or that. But actually, we have annual money streams that we will use to test unmanned system(s), manned systems, communications systems, that kind of things.

And then that's – I think that's the balance. Finding the balance by standardizing growing, but at the same time continuing to innovate and learn.

And the last bit is going from an army with about 20 percent reserves to in the future having about 50 percent reserves. We really need to look at how can we have reserve formations that are capable with the readiness and the combat abilities we're looking for. And that's one of the reasons why our rather recent very close relationship with Minnesota National Guard is so important, because we are actually looking there to learn

how they are able to generate combined arms reserve capabilities at a very high level as far as I can see.

Mr. Karako: You know, they – the Minnesota National Guard connection, for the broader audience, can you tell us a little bit about the history of that?

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. Minnesota National Guard and the Norwegian Armed Forces, or more specifically the Home Guard, have had an exchange program since the '70s. And that has – and Norwegians going to Minnesota is like coming back home. It goes back to my –

Mr. Karako: (Laughs.) It's the coldest place we could find.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah, and there's lots of Norwegians there. At least that's the impression we get. So – and that's been there for a long, long time.

Then, about five years ago, we started discussing about a state partnership program, expanding on that, I would say, special relationship between Minnesota and Norway. And I think it's about three years ago we signed a new state partnership program, which now opens up. So we have Norwegian F-35s stationed in the U.S. who literally fly up to Minnesota and train with Minnesotan National Guard F-16s.

The Norwegian Army, we just finished a large exercise in Norway. I had 20 NCOs and officers from Minnesota embedded in my headquarters, helping us to learn division-level fights but also building competencies for them on how is it to fight in an area where it's cold and the hills are rather steep.

Mr. Karako: (Laughs.)

Major Gen. Lervik: So that's – and I just came from a meeting with the National Guard leadership before I came here, and we have agreed that we will continue to build on this in the – in the years to come because there is lots to be gained both for Norwegian Army but also for National Guard.

Mr. Karako: Yeah. Well, staying – closely connected to that, wonder if you could talk a little bit about Norway's fairly unique conscription arrangement. It's universal. It's gender neutral. But only about 18 percent or so are selected to serve. So tell us how that works, and what we ought to learn from that, maybe what other countries might think about.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. And it's – to understand Norwegian conscription, I think it's – you have to kind of understand also Norwegian culture. It's an integrated part of our history. It used to be about 90-95 percent of all men who served. Now we are down to probably somewhere between 15 and 18

percent of men and women in the aggregate serve. The situation is the fact that it's conscription, but it's more like voluntary conscriptions. There are more who want to serve than actually we can fit into the Armed Forces. Which for an Army chief is a great situation, of course.

And why is that? I think there's two reasons. There's always the reason, it's an adventure. It's something that the youth look upon to do something else. But I think – and to an increasing degree – it's about the mission, the purpose of defending your own country. And it's amazing meeting those 19-, 20-year-olds, when I ask them, why are you here? Well, I want to be here to become the best soldier I can and also being able to defend the country if I have to. So there are those that say that today's youth are only focused on themselves, they haven't met the Norwegian conscripts. (Laughter.)

What this leads to is that we don't have a recruitment issue. Also, for recruitment into the reserves. I'm very confident that will be able to grow 50 percent reserves, especially on the privates. It also leads to the fact that 90 – between 90 and 95 percent of my officers have been conscripts before becoming officers. So they have – and that fits very well in Norwegian psyche, that you have been on the – literally, on the floor before you start becoming a boss. That gives you credibility. And 100 percent of the NCOs comes from the conscripts and will come from there. So that's the situation.

What you can learn from it? I think it's about – you see the same situation in the Nordics. Conscription has this image in the Nordics. If you want to change it, I think you have to have some patience and use some time to make sure that you change the way conscription is being perceived. And your best ambassadors, if you ask me, Are the 19-20-year-olds who are doing their conscription. They are the one – they are the best recruitment agents I could dream of.

Mr. Karako: Well, you just said, you know, the Norwegian Army doesn't have a recruiting challenge. The U.S. Army, of course, by contrast, does. But in answering that, you used a phrase that we were talking in the back about, and that is the Norwegian psyche. And we talked about various films and books that describe that. For the American audience, what is the Norwegian psyche to which you're referring?

Major Gen. Lervik: I think there's two elements of it. We are a very nonhierarchical society. We call our prime minister with the first name. I've been called by the first name by most of the Army soldiers. So it's a very – it's a very, very nonhierarchical society. Meaning that actually signing up and doing your part is partly what's expected. And then the other bit is Norwegians might agree on lots of – disagree on lots of stuff, but

actually defending our way of life, and also still remembering how it feels to be occupied, is a strong part of our psyche. And that's why I think our willingness to stand up against any threats, that's still rather strong, and reflected in the parliament unanimously deciding to double – more than double the defense spending. 70 percent of the Norwegian population will defend Norway, et cetera, et cetera. There are many indications that that's still a strong part of our culture.

Mr. Karako: Great. Well, on this question of personnel, a question has come in. Could you talk about the issue of timing in providing and training enough Norwegian personnel to man and operate intricate high-tech equipment, especially in terms of operating effectively with allies? So the question of timing and training for this high-tech equipment.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. Norwegian conscription is, for most, 12 months. Could be 15 months. Some do 18. But most do 12 to 15 months. And we will have conscripts operate all types of equipment in the Army, main battle tanks, artillery, rangers, everything. And, based on the selection we do from those 15 to 18 percent, and their motivation, seldom the limitation is the individual, the private soldier's ability to learn how to operate. So that's – I'm pretty confident in that ability. What we have done, recognizing that the key to success here is not necessarily the private, but it's the NCO and the officer.

And that's why we have, over the last three to four years, put more emphasis on training our NCOs, focusing also our officer training, more on actually their first assignment as a platoon leader. And we are in the process of setting up a much more systematic program for training our young NCOs and officers throughout their career. Partly because as we grow, we become younger. So you will have younger officers in position compared to previously. So we need to make sure that they're competent. But also, based on the assumption that by providing them competencies, they will succeed. If you succeed, you will stay. And thereby, we will be able to have the retention we also looking for to be able to continue to grow here.

Mr. Karako: Great. Well, you mentioned a minute ago sort of the flatness of Norwegian society. Let me talk about another kind of flatness, atopic that I know you're passionate about, and that's interoperability. And you already alluded to, you're trying to have common vehicles with other Nordic countries, things like that. So talk to us about other aspects of interoperability, first within NORDEFCO, but also within broader NATO, and that sort of thing. So what else is going on, on interoperability, for the Army?

Major Gen. Lervik: The big change with Sweden and Finland becoming members of NATO – and I'm starting with the Nordics – is that instead of this being an area with Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and three different plans, and three different territories, from a military view now it is one area of operation. So the borders are gone. We now plan for how to defend the Nordics. It's based on military logic and not borders. Then that also means that we need to start looking at Norwegian units will have to be capable of operating, for instance, in Finland. Norwegian units must be able to be under Finnish command, and the other way around. And the same with Swedish units as well. That's a very, very different way of driving innovation, because then it's not, well, if you like to. Now we have to.

And that means in this one area operation there is one plan, there is one command structure, and we are now building these capabilities together. Technically, we are still working on it. Lots of that is about classification. National classification is still an issue. Doctrinally, we are actually, I think, we were further ahead. We've been operating together in Afghanistan as well. So we're better there. And then equipment-wise, we are starting to tear down those national rules which have been there out of, not necessarily operational requirements, but other. That's being slowly removed, meaning we become more and more interchangeable in ammunition, in logistics, in these kind of things.

And you can actually just expand that. And looking at the Norwegian-U.S. – Nordic-U.S. relationship. It's the same drivers. General Donahue is driving hard on modernizing, making the deterrence credible from the land forces in Europe, and, if necessary, how we will fight and win. And that also goes back to the same things about interoperability, and C4ISR, we're able to command and control, sharing data, interchangeability and logistics. And that's also being driven by a new set of NATO plans.

And finally, all the things I've talked about now are important. But the most important thing, if you ask me, that is still trust between soldiers, trust between commanders. So that's why I'm here, is to meet U.S. commanders. That's why I speak on a daily basis with my Nordic army colleagues, because we are – we are building that trust, that confidence in our ability to work together day by day.

Mr. Karako: Now, just staying with that, you know, and what you described as no borders, I mean, that puts a very different perspective on a 500-kilometer Chunmoo if you're standing way back here than if you're – (laughs) – rolling up into Finland. That has a very different – very different flavor, for instance.

But you mentioned the Finland and Sweden thing specifically. What

level of integration, what kinds of activities are being done now that perhaps weren't able to be done, or at least weren't done before they joined NATO?

Major Gen. Lervik: If you look back to the last 20 years, we have exercised across our borders on a regular basis, but not as one force. That changed: Nordic Response 2024, one command structure operating in – and units operating in Norway and in Finland, literally crossing and linking up on the Norwegian-Finnish border about the same day as Sweden became members of NATO. That kind of integration didn't happen. This year the same thing happened, but this time on the large exercise we did exercising in Norway and Finland simultaneously under the same command structure. So that's an example. Mission rehearsal are now becoming more and more regular.

You see the same things especially for the air forces as well. And with now also Finland becoming an F-35 nation, this will – this relationship become even stronger. But I think it's fair to say that even before they were members of NATO they were the closest to being a NATO member without being a NATO member. So it's more about reinforcing the things we used to do than a major change in types of activities.

Mr. Karako: Well, I want to have you segue to interoperability with the U.S. Army, for instance.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah.

Mr. Karako And on that front – this is closely related to that. You've got a lot of questions coming in, by the way. One person asked: What would you like to see from the U.S. to improve overall bilateral or Arctic Seven-level security cooperation? What does the operational division of labor look like under a NATO 3.0 with Europe-led deterrence? So it's related to interoperability, but we'll get back to that in a minute. So what comes to mind there?

Major Gen. Lervik: I think, first of all, it's important for me to communicate that we got the message. We need to take a larger part of the burden here, and we are. We are signing up for that. And that's why we are planning to do a larger part in defending our part – being our part of the first-line defense. We are taking that much more seriously than we have had in the past.

Having said that, I still think – and we learned that lesson in 1940 – there's a difference to fighting alone and fighting with allies. So we still strongly believe in fighting with allies, and that's why having U.S. Marine Corps training in Norway every winter. That's why working so closely

with U.S. Army, as we have been over many decades. That's why working with Minnesota National Guard is so important. Because I think that provides deterrence, but also if necessary ensures that we are able to fight together if we have to.

So I'm not necessarily wanting something else; I just want us to continue to build on the relationships and the capabilities we have, but also communicating that we got the message. We need to step up. We need to do a larger part – carry a larger part of the burden in our part of the world.

Mr. Karako: You mentioned in particular, I think – I think you alluded to common C4, at least among certain nations. General Donahue, U.S. Army Europe, in talking about a software-defined architecture across NATO more generally, how does Norway fit into that broader architecture? And what kind of progress is being made there?

Major Gen. Lervik: There's some really, really good successes on that field, which I like to give a couple example of before actually addressing some of the remaining issues, because not everything has been sorted out.

But we are able to digitally communicate target data from a Norwegian forward observer to a B-52 coming in without any human in the loop, and this B-52 is a part of a package where also Norwegian F-35s and Norwegian special forces are operating in the same digital C4 structure. So that's one example of where we are. And I don't think many are able to do that, except from us.

Two months ago, we executed live firing using U.S. HIMARS; Norwegian K9 guns; British guns, 105; and our Norwegian, American, and British C4 structure in the same manner, digitally being able to share target data, engage targets, and also getting target data from Norwegian F-35s into this kill chain. So, in some areas, I think we are very, very well advanced.

The challenge is that those are kind of isolated areas. We need to be able to share a much, much larger amount of data between us, and then that goes back to General Donohue's points about open architecture. But I think also all of us have to have a close look at how we classify information, what data we are willing to share, and who we're willing to share with. I think that that's where the future – the future lies. If we're able to do that, that would significantly increase our deterrence and our ability to fight.

Mr. Karako: Yeah. But on that front, again, you mentioned Norway's getting the South Korean Chunmoo.

Major Gen. Lervik: And again, as some of you probably know, when we were looking at long-range precision fires there were some – there was at least two options. It was HIMARS and it was Chunmoo. And –

Mr. Karako: And Poland went through the same thing.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah, Poland the same thing. And just to make that point as well, we are still buying lots of things from the U.S. and we'll continue to buy from the U.S. I think everything that flies in the Norwegian armed forces comes from the U.S. – almost everything, at least – and we will continue to invest significantly into U.S. military capabilities.

Chunmoo was actually chosen because they were the ones that could deliver the capabilities we needed within the budget I had within the timeline I had. That was probably – or, that was the reason. I don't think that will present an interoperability change challenge in itself, because the same C2 structure, C2 system that we will use for Chunmoo was the one I just described that we're able to communicate with F-35, HIMARS. And so that doesn't really – that doesn't – I don't see that as a problem. I think it's more from the U.S. perspective it means there's an ally who can reach out 500 clicks as a part of a multidomain operation, and – in just a few years. I think that's a way of telling that we are serious on our part of this commitment, our part of the – of the burden sharing.

Mr. Karako: Well, another species of interoperability or multinational cooperation is on the defense industry side.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah.

Mr. Karako: Norway has Kongsberg with this NASAMS and Nammo, for instance, which supplies lots of other NATO allies, including the U.S. Marines. From where you're observing the NATO defense industrial base, what are you seeing? What kind of prioritization? How do you sense the urgency within the industrial base?

Major Gen. Lervik: I would want to have significantly more urgency in the industrial base.

Mr. Karako: You want more.

Major Gen. Lervik: I want more, yes.

Mr. Karako: OK.

Major Gen. Lervik: Looking at the delivery times we are looking at, that's not where I wanted to be. I would like it to be more. But the good news is companies like Kongsberg are by nature multinational. So they are producing weapons systems among other places in Norway and in the U.S. And I think that's also a part of being allies, is by doing that we're able to share technology and also have resilience in our structures.

But I think we – all of us really need to take a hard look at how we can scale up during peacetime our defense industrial base, and more important what can we do if a crisis or war? How do we scale up significantly? That's something I think we need to take as serious as building up our armed forces.

Mr. Karako: Yeah.

Got another question that's come in here: How is the Norwegian Army leveraging technology to strengthen warfighting deterrence on NATO's northern flank? The best part of that question is it says northern flank. It's the eastern front. But so in terms of the industrial base, in terms of high technology, what comes to mind for you, for instance?

Major Gen. Lervik: I'm happy both the northern flank and the – so that's –

Mr. Karako: That's good, yeah.

Major Gen. Lervik: No, I think that that's where what I pointed to about the innovation programs that we specifically are allocating resources for. And it's about using new technology, but also being able to use new technology combined with existing systems we have. Because we are not in the position to change everything from one year to another. So we need to look at integration between the new things and what we have. In order to do that, we are recognizing that we need to change the way we do this. We need to be much, much closer between research, industry, and defense. That is something that we're working on.

And as we are starting to do that, you will – you will challenge the way you acquisition the programs we have, and how we can do that. So I don't have the solution to do that, but I'm sure we need to look at a much more efficient way and much more closer cooperation with industry than what we've had. Also looking at the lifecycle support of our systems.

Mr. Karako: Cold Response '26 just wrapped up last month, in March – or, I guess, two months ago, now it's May. Tell us what Cold Response is. This was a

big exercise, 32,000 people, 14 allies. Obviously, Norway has very capable Arctic operations. What is it? And what did you learn from this – from this event?

Major Gen. Lervik: Cold Response 2026, NATO's largest field exercise this year. In military terms, it's a combined joint field training exercise. To try and describe what that is, it means it has all elements of military capabilities there – air, sea, land, space, cyber. It also means that there were 14 different nations participating in this exercise. Most of it happened in Norway and along our coast, but also a significant part happened in northern Finland as well. So that's what Cold Response is.

What is it about? It's a mission rehearsal. For us, it's about receiving 4,500 U.S. Marines and soldiers into Norway, getting them ready, helping them train in the winter and with the steep hills, and then testing our ability to operate at the final part, which is the last two weeks. But this actually lasts for almost half a year. But the two weeks is the exercise itself. And finally, for us, it's about working with our allies, training on how to defend – exercising how to defend Norway and the Nordics. But also it's an opportunity to utilize our total defense system.

So how do the – how can our port authorities support allies coming in? How can we utilize our hospitals to support casualties? Not only of Norwegians, but from allies? So we tested evacuating 400 casualties from Finland through railroad to a large hospital in Norway to test those total defense system, where it's about actually the whole of Norway defending Norway.

Mr. Karako: Well, let me stay in the Arctic but connect it with another part of the world, which is to say the Indo-Pacific. Again, I keep coming back to Focus 2026. Has a whole big section on Beijing, a whole big section on China as a kind of indirect threat. We've got a question come in actually, on this very topic. Which is, you know what would it take to begin thinking about China as more of a direct threat, as an indirect threat? But perhaps, in answering that, can you make some connections? You know, why is it that what China is doing in the Arctic – why does that matter? And what are the connections between what is happening in the Arctic and what's happening in the Indo-Pacific, for instance?

Major Gen. Lervik: It's a huge question. I'll try to hit a couple of points at least. First of all, in that report, it's an unclass report so it's available. It's stated pretty clearly that we're seeing Chinese espionage influence operation also being directed towards Norway and Norwegian interests – and not only military, but also in the industrial and other parts of our life. So that's one part of it. They are a part of the ongoing competition, or whatever you want to describe it, in that sphere. The other thing which we see is

that China is focusing towards the Arctic. They claim to be a near-Arctic nation. They are establishing icebreakers.

We're seeing them mainly on the research and commercial part. And the assessment of that, it's mainly about resources now. We don't see a significant Russian – sorry – Chinese military presence. But we're seeing that they are definitely buying oil, gas, looking at how to get resources from the Arctic. And mainly from Russia. So that puts them into the whole – the whole setting here. So therefore, I think Norway keeping a presence, keeping a good situational awareness, understanding what's happening in the Arctic, is not only about the Russian military threat. It's about understanding the whole threat here, including also Chinese interest and their pursuit of those.

Mr. Karako: And there's other similarities too, right, in terms of just the tyranny of distance, the salience of long-range fires in a maritime context, of course, allied integrations. There's lots of other connections as well.

Well, look –

Major Gen. Lervik: And, just if I may, to that point, it's – looking at the U.S. conceptual thinking about how to fight in the Pacific. There are very, very clear similarities to how we need to fight in the Arctic. And you pointed to some of them. So it means, for instance, working with the U.S. Marine Corps, their force design sometimes I would argue that it's almost more force design for fighting in Norway than in the Pacific. It fits very well into that kind of fight. And I also think that, therefore, by training and doing exercises in Norway, you are not only preparing to fight in Norway. You're also preparing to fight other parts of the world. And there are also parts of the Pacific here it's pretty cold, the last time I checked. So cold weather operation capabilities are actually useful not only in the Nordics.

Mr. Karako: Well, we've covered a lot of ground. I couldn't get to all the – you actually had quite a few questions come in. Couldn't get – couldn't get to all of them. Worked in as many as we could. But we always try to close out with trying to get our senior leaders to kind of give some insights into what they're reading or what they've been reading. So I wonder if you might have any suggestions for things to be reading about. First of all, the future of landpower, but also to help us understand Norway a little better.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. OK. Yeah. This is actually not the last book, but it's a book I got from the U.S. Army attaché in Norway. He gave it to me last autumn. It's "Unit X," written by Shah and Kirchhoff. It describes how the U.S. armed forces tried to link up with Silicon Valley to scale up innovation and

change. And even though – even though the scale is different, this was very, very recognizable. Also, a large part of the inspiration that led the Norwegian Army to drive in setting up innovation program, looking at new ways to integrate and work with industry. And I don't think there's many answers in that book, but there's some really good pointers of where we need to go. So I was at least very inspired. I would recommend it to anyone to read that book. It's a good one.

To understand Norway, well, that's – I can tell you to read some of the old Viking books and things like that. (Laughter.) But I won't do that. If you want to get a glimpse of a better understanding of the Norwegian psyche, I think the book "The Moon is Down," by John Steinbeck. It's a book about a village in a not-disclosed country, but we're pretty sure it's on the western coast of Norway, resisting the Nazi occupation during the Second World War. And in addition to, or if you don't have time to read the book, I would strongly recommend the movie "Number 24" on Netflix. It's about our most decorated war hero from the Second World War. He had three Medal of Honor decorations. And it gives you an insight into how the Norwegian population resisted anyone who tried to occupy us, and a good insight into our psyche, I think.

Mr. Karako: Yeah. Well, this is fantastic. I have to confess – well, first of all, I hope the Russians read "The Moon is Down."

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. Yeah. (Laughter.)

Mr. Karako: And then, I have to confess, I'm a big fan of the Norwegian show "Occupied." Maybe not the best reflection of the psyche things you're taking, but certainly of the insidious Russian potential, if nothing else.

Major Gen. Lervik: Yeah. And there's certain elements of that psyche, but – yeah. Not – yeah. I agree.

Mr. Karako: Fair enough. All right. Well, General, thank you so much for your time. We're really glad. And, again, thanks to our sponsors and to AUSA for making this possible. So please join me in thanking General Lervik. Appreciate it. (Applause.)

(END.)